



File Code: 5460/2300

Date: February 26, 2013

The Gallatin National Forest is seeking your feedback on a proposal involving a potential exchange of rights for Forest Road 166B (West Fork Loop Road), Forest Road 166D (Basin Road), National Forest Trail #403 (Pygmy/Ridge Trail) and the North Fork trailhead. These roads and trails are located near Big Sky, Montana in the North Fork of the West Fork of the Gallatin River drainage.

**Background:**

For the past several years the Forest Service has been working in a collaborative effort with land owners and interested parties in the North Fork drainage north of Big Sky to resolve a number of access issues and to consider an exchange of existing easements for new easements to access National Forest system lands. This has been a large and complex undertaking and I want to acknowledge the work and contributions of these adjacent and affected land owners to come to an effective solution. Since the proposal under consideration involves the exchange of some rights currently held by the United States to access the Gallatin National Forest in lieu of new easements, it is important that the public understand and give feedback on the proposal relative to the current situation.

**Current Situation:**

The United States currently holds full and perpetual public easements for Forest Road 166B and Forest Road 166D in the North Fork of the West Fork of the Gallatin River near Big Sky. These road easements are held from Highway 64 at two locations to form a loop road and eventually tie to National Forest System lands in Section 16. The United States also holds a perpetual easement for the North Fork Trailhead in Section 27 which serves the North Fork Trail #16. These easements and facilities are held by the Forest Service and are on private lands held subject to these easements.

Forest Service Trail #403 begins along FR 166B on private land and continues to National Forest System lands, eventually connecting with Trail #402, Trail #40, Beehive Basin and beyond.

There have been ongoing discussions for years with the associated land owners about use of these facilities, re-establishing an easement to bypass a house along FR 166B, securing a recorded easement for Trail #403, future development including snowplowing on these roads,



providing recreational opportunities for the public and providing adequate access to National Forest system lands for the public. A map is included that illustrates this layout.

**Proposal:**

Under this proposal the North Fork Trailhead would serve both the North Fork Trail #16 and a new 6.8 mile trail loop that would be constructed in Sections 20, 21, 22, 27 on private land that would eventually connect to National Forest Trail # 403. This new trail would be located on a perpetual, public, year-round easement held by a public trail management entity for all non-motorized public uses, granted by each private land owner. Full jurisdiction would be given to this trail management entity, assignable to the United States. Trail #403 is also accessible from the north via Beehive Basin.

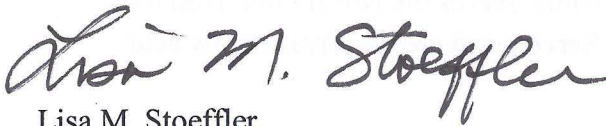
The United States would continue to hold a full and perpetual public road easement on FR 166B on the east side of the loop from Highway 64 to the North Fork Trailhead in Section 27. The Forest Service would hold an easement for administrative use only from Highway 64 on FR 166B and on FR 166D to National Forest system lands on the west side of the loop with an adequate reroute around the home on FR 166B. A map is included that illustrates this layout.

The Bozeman Ranger District will be hosting an open house to answer questions about the proposal on March 14, 4:30-6:00 at the First Security Bank meeting room at 78 Meadow Village Drive in Big Sky.

Since access to public land is important to many who live and recreate in this area it is critical that we understand how this exchange would affect how you use and enjoy this piece of public land. To be most helpful, your feedback on the proposal is needed by March 29, 2013.

Feedback can be submitted in writing to Lisa Stoeffler at the Bozeman Ranger District, 3710 Fallon, Bozeman, MT, 59718, or electronically to [FS-comments-northern-gallatin@fs.fed.us](mailto:FS-comments-northern-gallatin@fs.fed.us) with "FR166B comments" in the subject line.

Sincerely,



Lisa M. Stoeffler  
District Ranger